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SUBJECT: TURKEY AND IRAQ FINALLY MEET ON REGIONAL WATER

¶1. (sbu) Summary: Tigris-Euphrates river flows and irrigation issues were the main subjects at an historic May 24 meeting in Ankara between Turkish and Iraqi water experts. Topics included use of "closed system" irrigation in Turkey and restoration efforts for the marshlands in Iraq. The Turkish side was generally satisfied with the meeting and reiterated its position that it is always ready to cooperate with Iraq on management of the shared rivers system. End Summary.

Water Flows and Irrigation

¶2. (sbu) Following failed attempts to meet earlier this year, Turkey finally met with Iraq water officials to start sharing information on water flows and uses. GOT MFA water department head Esen Altug described the May 24 meeting in Ankara between Turkish and Iraqi water officials as historic and a good start after a lapse of 14-15 years without meeting. She said representatives from the Turkish Ministries of Energy and Agriculture and DSI (State Water Works Agency) received Iraqi officials from the Ministry of Water Resources to discuss a range of technical water issues. Both sides gave presentations on topics such as the use of "closed system" irrigation in Turkey, restoration of the marshlands in Iraq, and projected river flows for the Tigris-Euphrates.

¶3. (sbu) The Deputy Director General of DSI hosted and presented Turkey's water and hydroelectric situation at the one-day meeting. Altug encouraged us to meet directly with DSI to get a more technical read-out and obtain a copy of Turkey's powerpoint presentation in English.

¶4. (sbu) According to Altug, the Iraqi delegation expressed interest in considering bringing the "closed system" type of irrigation system used in Turkey to Iraq. Embassy Baghdad told us that Turkey specifically questioned the Iraqis about the Mosul dam and pollution flowing from the irrigation drainage waters flowing into the Gulf, but Altug was not able or willing to confirm this line of inquiry.

¶5. (sbu) According to Altug, the Iraqis provided general information on the current water situation in Iraq, including river flows for the year to date. The Turks also provided an update on the water situation for the Tigris and the Euphrates for the coming year. Altug was aware that Turkey had provided an additional 200 cms flow on the Euphrates last year, but she did not know the projection for this year.

Future Discussions

¶6. (sbu) The MFA rep expressed general satisfaction with the meeting and informed us that they would work together on direction and timing of future discussions between the two countries, but nothing specific had yet been agreed upon. She expressed the standard Turkish position that it is always ready to cooperate with Iraq.

¶7. (sbu) Altug complained that the Iraqi presentation was oral with written copies only in Arabic. She said the Iraqi Embassy in Ankara was preparing English translations and the Iraqi delegation promised to provide an electronic copy of the presentation. Altug also asserted that Iraq had not provided a full response to Turkey's information request from 2004.

¶8. (sbu) Comment: We will pursue a more detailed read-out and the Turkish presentation from DSI. We believe that a fruitful next step in encouraging regional cooperation, trust, and information exchange would be a program like the joint Embassies Baghdad and Ankara proposal for the Tigris-Euphrates River Basin Cooperation Initiative which would entail a two-week Voluntary Visitor Program for Turkish and Iraqi officials.

Wilson